

# BADMINTON'S LONG MARCH TO THE GAMES

*Speed, grace, energy, skill -  
badminton today. Here, Poul-Erik  
Hoyer-Nielsen (DEN).*



The magnetism of the Olympic Games is best illustrated in badminton where the International Badminton Federation struggled for forty years years to get sixty-two national federations to affiliate and then, five years later, had exceeded a hundred.

*By Roy Ward*

**W**hen Jim Worrall handed the Olympic flag to IBF President Poul-Erik Nielsen in the centre of the Calgary Saddledome in June 1985, there were no thoughts in their minds that the tortoise would shed the shell to unleash a hare. Yet, badminton is a sport probably older than the ancient Olympic Games. The Guinness Book of Records credits the game as being played in the second millennium in China and there is ample evidence to prove the history of the game.

However, we can be sure that the modern game with its high society beginnings in the Gloucestershire home of the Duke of Beaufort, Badminton House, bears little resemblance to the original version. Han Jian, the first of the Chinese singles world champions, then Yang Yang with two world singles titles and, more recently, the champion Zhao Jianhua have given the game speed, grace, stamina, skill and awesome power. Perhaps, badminton has seen the last of the old world grace of

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India's Prakash Padakone and the clever dance steps that helped Denmark's Morten Frost Hansen to four All England Singles titles but never a world championship.

## OLYMPIC MEDALS

Yet doubtless the Olympic Games in Barcelona will bring a new crop of names to badminton and for four years afterwards the whole of the badminton family will live in the reflected glory of those names.

The importance of winning the first badminton Olympic gold medals will overshadow all other priorities in the lives of those people striving for this ultimate recognition, which will be shared by six players.

Well, you might ask, why did it take so long for the IOC to accept to its family a sport with such ancient beginnings? Badminton was an exhibition sport at the 1972 Games in Munich but it was thirteen years before it was admitted as a medal sport and twenty years before its first participation. Now, the IBF can't lay blame at the feet of the IOC because it had its own teething problems with launching badminton as a medal sport. Now the IBF is honouring its admission to the Olympic Games in a unique way.

## THE BEST PLAYERS

In order to get its quota of a hundred and ninety-two players to Barcelona, it has evolved the World Ranking System, which evaluates the performances of every player who participates in recognized events over an eighteen-month period up to April 30th, 1992.

Badminton will have its best players in Barcelona and it will also respect the IOC's wish to give every country the opportunity to have their players there, as well as seeing that every continent is represented.

The programme will be men's and women's singles and doubles, with the magnificent mixed doubles yet to receive recognition for future Games.

The drawing power of the Olympic movement brought development and membership from Mediterranean countries - Italy, Greece and Syria; Guatemala (Central America); Grenada and Guyana (West Indies); Argentina (South America); Madagascar, Seychelles (Indian ocean) and Western Samoa and Fiji (Oceania).

In fact, every country that had treated badminton merely as a social game supplemented with a cup of tea, a beer and a pleasant afternoon now saw the hope of a gold medal.

The change in attitude in badminton had its roots in the work of past presidents Stellan Mohlin (Sweden) and Craig Reddie (Scotland) who focused the IBF Council



*Ardy B. Wiranata (INA).*

and its total membership on the principles of Olympism, with its embodiment of the spirit of competition and the values of peace in a world constantly battling against the shadows of disaster.

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*Susi Susanti (INA).*



*Zhao Jianhua (CHN), men's singles world champion.*



The Olympic Games is the No. 1 target of the IBF and the build up is through the World Championships and Thomas and Uber Cups and the Sudirman Cup held in alternate years.

There were four major steps on the road to the Olympic Games in the past fifty years.

## NEW CHAMPIONS

In 1939, Sir George Thomas Bart gave the Thomas Cup for men's team events and this doubled in numbers in four years and when Mrs H.S. (Betty) Uber gave the Uber Cup for women's team events this also attracted increasing numbers. The introduction of the Thomas and Uber Cups also saw a swing away from European domination of the sport where the staid audiences responded to "Quiet Please" to

the spectator involvement in the stadia of Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand.

There were also new household names in the sport with Malaysians Wong Peng Soon and Eddie Choong; Tan Joe Hok and Rudy Hartono, who went on to win eight All England Singles and a World Championship and help to put Indonesia among the best badminton nations in the world.

The great doubles teams were Tjun Tjun and Johan Wahjudi and Ade Chandra and Christian Hadinata in Indonesia and, almost forgotten, the Danish pair of Hammergaard Hansen and Finn Kobbero. Steen Fladberg and Jesper Helledie retrieved European honour with a doubles championship in Copenhagen at the 1983 World titles but the new names on the scene were China's Li Yongbo and Tian Bingyi and Korea's Joe Bong Park and Moon kim Soon and the five Sidek brothers from Malaysia.

## EXCITEMENT OF THE GAME

These doubles teams excite large crowds with their constant fusillade of shots with the most deceptive shots to wrongfoot their opponents.

The same pattern evolved in the progress of the Uber Cup but it went via the United States of America to Japan for five of the next six years with Noriki Takagi, Tomoko Takahashi, Etsuko Tokuda, Mikiko Takada and Hiroe Yuki being the popular players.

The best Indonesian players were World Singles champion Verawaty Wiharjo and Imelda Wigoeno, then the Chinese took over as world leaders. Opponents and team members were Li Lingwei and Ham Aiping, who were exponents of singles and doubles play who won also world singles.

They also had the great doubles teams of Lin Ying, who won the World's doubles

three times and with Guan Weizhen (twice) and Wu Dixi on the first occasion. Guan recently won a third world doubles title when she took Nong Qunhua as her partner.

New to the scene are World Champions Tang Jiahong (women's singles), Susi Susanti, Sarwendah (Indonesia) and new Korean players. Or will a European woman become the first Olympic Gold medallist?

While it is easy to become spellbound by the players of eastern Asia, there are Denmark's squadron of young flyers - Thomas Stuer-Lauridsen, Poul-Erik Hoyer-Larsen, Thomas Lund, Jon Holst-Christensen, Ib Frederiksen, Henrik Svarrer, Jens Peter Nierkoff etc.

The winning of an Olympic gold medal, and particularly the first for a sport, is the greatest test of a champion and we look forward to see who fills the space on the rostrum in Barcelona.

R.W.



***Tang Jiahong (CHN), world singles champion.***



***Razif and Jalani Sidek, from Malaysia.***